THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The history of the Christian Church may not be very lively reading, unless one is interested. But it is wholesome reading for the average man, if not for their details, at least for the enlarging of his notion as to the place and influence of the Church in the development of European civilization.

Many people have a notion that Christianity has always had its present form of numerous religious sects.

The Episcopal Church has a history of a thousand years previous to the time when religious denominations began to spring up.

It would not be correct to say the Episcopal Church is the oldest church, any more than it would be correct to say the Greek or the Roman Catholic Church is the oldest.

The Episcopal Church, The Roman Catholic and the Great Greek Church, which is not Roman Catholic, all have the same historic origin.

The Episcopal Church did not spring from the Roman Catholic Church as some would have us believe.

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded an institution which he called His Church. It was a definate organization. It had a constitution, which we call the Faith. It had officers, Apostles, Bishops, Priests and Deacons. It had sources of spiritual power and life, called sacraments; it was to represent Him, and to do what He would do were He able to be on earth. St. Paul calls this Church "Christ's Body." Its life began on Whitsunday at Jerusalem, in the year 29, ten days after our Lord left the earth.

This organization was very small at first, but it had the power to grow and enlarge. The apostles consecrated successors, called bishops, to carry on the Church.

The Bishops ordained priests and deacons.

The Church thus founded spread about the Mediterranean Sea. By the year 100 A.D., it existed in Africa, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy and Gaul. Before the end of the second century it had been planted in the island of Britain. It was one great universal organization, holding a common faith, having the same ministry, administering the same sacraments, and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As it grew it began to be influenced by the national customs and languages of the lands to which it extended. In the East the services were held in Greek and in the West in Latin. In various sections the Church used the local tongues.

But it was one universal Church. The word universal is the same as the owrd Catholic. The Church was Catholic in the sense that it was universal. That is the sense in which we use the word in the Creed. We should not confuse this use of the word with the popular use in our day. when people mistakenly say Catholic, when they mean Roman Catholic. In these early centuries the use of the words Roman Catholic, was unknown. There was a branch of the Catholic or Universal Church in Rome, just as there was in Greece and Egypt and England.

There were bishops at every great center and in countless small cities. It was natural that bishops of very large cities should have power which the other bishops did not have. They associated themselves with the political development of the time. So it came to pass that in two cities especially, Constantinople and Rome, the bishops began to assume a leadership among their fellows. By 500A.D. the bishops of both Constantinople and Rome had assumed power in the Church which brought disaster. In Rome this was the beginning of a tendency which later developed into the Papacy or the assumption of the Bishop of Rome of a position of authority over the whole Church. But the Church in Rome was still part of the Universal Church, in spite of these claims of its Bishops.

These claims were resisted by the branch of the Church in Constantinople, and so serious did the conflict become that finally the Church in the East and the Church at Rome separated. This was in the year 1054. The Church of England retained its original standing, and the Continental Church was broken into two parts. The year 1054 marks historically the separate existence of the Universal Church in Rome as distinctly the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church was brought to England inthe second century and was represented at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. In the fourth and fifth centuries the Angles, Saxons and Judes invaded England and drove the original inhabitanta, the Celts, or Britons with the Church, towards the west, into Ireland, Cornwall, and Wales. Thus Britain became heathen again after having had the Church for three centuries.

Immediately the Church began an effort to convert these heathen invaders, and missionaries from the Celtic Church made their way back among the Anglo-Saxons.

St. Augustine, with a band of followers, representing the same Universal Church of which the Celtic Church was a part, landed in Kent and came to Canterbury. There he found a church building which had not been destroyed byb the invaders. This church building, called St. Martin's, still stands just as St. Augustine found it in 597 A.D.

The ancient British stream of Christianity and the stream from Rome through Augustine flowed together into the mighty river of the English Church, in the seventh century.

This united Church preceded the united Kingdom, and by the efforts of the Church the united Kingdom was established.

Up to the year 1066 the Church continued to grow strong, having preserved all the necessary functions by which it maintained its continuous existence from the Church of Apostolic days.

In the year 1066 a great ploitical change took place. William the Norman came to England from France and conquered the land. Willâam the Norman was a Roman Catholic, that is to say, he owed allegiance to the Western Church in Europe which, having separated from the Eastern Church in 1054, now laid claim to the allegiance of all Christians in the West. England, because of its isolation, had been somewhat exempt from these pretensions. When Willaim conquered the land, however, he proceded to attempt to control the C Church and to bring it into subjection to the Church of Rome. The Church of England resisted this vigorously and the next four hundred years of its history is a period of continual conflict against the aggressions of the Church of Rome. The rulers of the nation were often adherents of the Church of Rome However, and by their power put Roman Catholic officials in high places. History gives us many evidences of this struggle. The charter of English liberty, called Magna Charta, the parchment of which still exists in the British Museum in London, asserts as one of its principles, that the Church of England shall be for ever free and inviolable. This struggle of the Church of England for independence might have continued much longer had it not been for the rise of an occasion in which the King of England rejected the authority of the Pope. This was the famous King Henry VIII. He was a Roman Catholic and a vicious man. There is a myth that he founded the Church of England, but that is only a popularv legend fostered to discredit the historical existence of the Church of England.

King Henry VIII wished to divorse his wife, for which he asked permission from the Pope. The Pope refused to give him permission and he rejected the Pope's authority. When the King turned against the power of the Church of Rome in England, the Church of England found its opportunity to drive out all Roman control, and in 1534 legal steps were taken which made it impossible for the Church of Rome ever again

to regain any control over the Church of England.

This was called the period of the Reformation.

From that time to the present day the Church of England has retained its rights and its property with only two brief struggles, one against the power of Queen Mary, and the other against Oliver Cromwell and his puritans.

The Episcopal Church in the United grew directly out of the Church of England, and whatever historic spiritual authority has resided within the Church of England is the possession of the Episcopal Church in America.